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ABSTRACT

By evaluating the 112 responses to a questionnaire sent to 241 speech teachers in 17 states, an attempt was made to identify the peculiar instructional problems confronting the high school speech teacher in classes composed of both Indian and non-Indian pupils. Teachers cited eight distinct student problem areas, including feelings of social inadequacy, natural shyness and reluctance to speak, poor vocabularies, and monotonal and mumbled delivery, all of which were aggravated by irregular attendance patterns. Seven major approaches were mentioned by teachers as effective solutions, such as encouraging Indian students to "warm up" with group speech activities before individual presentations and developing in students a greater knowledge and self-respect for Indian heritage. Concerning their own classroom effectiveness, teachers pointed to the need for special training in various areas of speech instruction and recommended that a clearinghouse be set up as a source of information exchange. (MF)

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THE INDIAN PUPIL IN THE HIGH SCHOOL SPEECH CLASS

Lynn R. Osborn

The Bureau of Indian Affairs reports that over 134,000 American Indian children were enrolled in elementary and secondary schools in this country last year. Of this number, 61.4% attended public schools. The present study attempts to identify the peculiar instructional problems confronting the high school speech teacher in classes composed of both Indian and non-Indian pupils.

In order to obtain a mailing list of speech teachers in public high schools where sizable numbers of American Indian pupils are enrolled with non-Indian pupils, the assistance of the Division of Education of the Bureau of Indian Affairs was enlisted. This agency provided a roster of those individuals responsible for Indian education in the following states having significant Indian populations: Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, Washington, Wisconsin, and Wyoming. In each instance, the writer contacted the official who was associated with a state department of public instruction and was able to provide a list of public high schools offering speech courses and having large enrollments of Indian pupils. With the exception of Alaska, each of these persons sent the desired list, and their generous cooperation is gratefully acknowledged.

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A questionnaire was sent to the speech teacher in each of the 241 public high schools designated by the seventeen cooperating state officials. Table I indicates the number of schools in each state receiving questionnaires and the number returned.

TABLE I
Questionnaire Distribution and Response

State	Questionnaires Sent	Number of Responses
Arizona	13	6
California	7	2
Colorado	5	1
Idaho	14	10
Minnesota	9	7
Montana	14	9
Nebraska	2	1
Nevada	7	5
New Mexico	17	9
North Dakota	7	4
Oklahoma	72	28
Oregon	6	1
South Dakota	11	4
Utah	6	2
Washington	39	17
Wisconsin	7	3
Wyoming	5	3
TOTALS	241	112

Not wishing to restrict artificially the information obtained from the respondents, questions of an open-ended nature called for both objective and subjective replies. The writer categorized the responses which are presented here in summary fashion.

Those teachers to whom the questionnaires were sent were asked first to identify the peculiar problems posed by Indian pupils in the high school speech class with non-

Indian pupils. The respondents cited eight distinct problem areas:

1. Feelings of insecurity and inadequacy on the part of the Indian pupils growing out of educational, economic, and social disadvantage as compared to their non-Indian peers.

2. Irregular attendance patterns of the Indian pupils, with resulting disruptions and lack of continuity in their work in the speech class. The respondents attributed much blame for poor attendance to parental prejudice and opposition to the integrated schools of Indian and non-Indian pupils.

3. Natural reticence and shyness of the Indian pupils, resulting in avoidance of speech activity whenever possible.

4. Manifest difficulty in choosing topics upon which to speak. The respondents felt that this problem grew out of the peer group insecurity and feelings of inadequacy set forth above in number one.

5. Comparatively inadequate training and background of the Indian pupil in needed research techniques, idea development, and organizational skills.

6. Serious problems of stage fright and lack of poise and confidence which were much more pronounced in the behavior of the Indian pupils than in that of the non-Indian pupils.

7. Vocal impediments and insufficiencies in the speech of many Indian pupils: poor vocabularies, mumbling, monotonal delivery, lack of adequate voice projection, articulatory difficulties, and the speaking of English with Indian accents.

8. Insensitivity to audience response because of almost total lack of eye contact by the Indian pupils with their listeners.

A very few of the respondents indicated that the Indian pupils in their speech classes who had grown up in the non-Indian community were completely assimilated, evidencing no greater or lesser difficulty in speech communication than their non-Indian peers.

The second major area of inquiry in the questionnaire, namely, "What have you found to be effective means of meeting and solving the problems faced in teaching the Indian pupil in the integrated speech class?" brought a wide variety of answers. These fell into the following seven major categories:

1. Providing maximum opportunity for positive interaction and improved rapport among the Indian and non-Indian pupils in the classroom setting.

2. Affording the Indian pupils opportunities for group speech activity as a prelude and "warm-up" for individual presentations. Many suggested that they had found discussion panels and choral reading to be especially effective in this regard.

3. Encouraging the Indian pupils to select speech topics related to their tribal background and heritage; that is, helping them to develop pride in their people and a feeling that non-Indians can be an interested and a receptive audience.

4. Developing a greater knowledge and understanding of the history, traditions, and culture of the tribe(s) represented by the Indian pupils in the speech class; and by eliminating the "white brother helping the savage Indian" attitude held by some teachers.

5. Working with tape recorders and instructing the phonetics of spoken English to help Indian pupils overcome their substandard speech.

6. Emphasizing to the Indian pupils the necessity for good speech in everyday living; job interviews, social conversation, giving and taking instructions as opposed to placing sole emphasis on public speaking.

The third segment of the questionnaire dealt with suggestions from the respondents as to what additional education, experience, or assistance might equip them to meet more adequately the peculiar needs of the Indian pupil in the speech class with non-Indian pupils. These replies were clustered under four headings:

1. More and better training in the recognition, understanding, and overcoming of barriers to effective intercultural communication with specific emphasis upon the American Indian.
2. Greater concentration on the various aspects of speech communication and student teaching experiences with Indian children in the teacher-education program.
3. More ready access to, and better training in the use of, audio-visual and other instructional aids appropriate to the teaching of speech.
4. A centralized source of information, instructional aids, and consultative assistance for public high school speech teachers instructing classes of both Indian and non-Indian pupils. Some also indicated that such a center might serve as a valuable clearing-house for the exchange of ideas and suggestions among the teachers themselves.

Miscellaneous and related comments were invited in the final portion of the questionnaire. The following are representative of the hundreds offered by the respondents:

This quarter my two full-blood girls handed in all papers but did not get up for one assignment until the final. After ten weeks of joking and talking with them (actually 2 or 3 years counting English classes), they gave timid little final speeches. If they had been forced, they would have quit school. If I had ignored them, they would never have gotten out of their shells. This means a very informal class situation which can mean trouble with the less withdrawn students.

What the Indian knows, he often thinks is not worthwhile or interesting to me or other whites. He is, for one thing, terribly preoccupied with being Indian and almost totally unaware that this is a goldmine of exotic and even genuinely exciting topics upon which he is an expert.

The Indian is a very reticent individual basically, and he must be drawn out carefully. Too much pushing with the wrong attitude will send him further back in his shell. They [sic] must feel a need and be made to want to do these things.

I still can never be sure that since an Indian child spoke to an audience one day, that he would do so again the following day.

Most of the problems of teaching white and Indian kids come from the community. There are all sorts of tensions a person can't expose without trouble . . . .

This study attempted to gain a broad overview of the peculiar problems faced by the public high school speech teacher in an integrated classroom of Indian and non-Indian pupils. As in any similar investigation, such variables as degree of assimilation into the non-Indian culture, geographic location, community mores and attitudes, and teacher preparation must be taken into consideration. The 112 teachers who responded to the questionnaire and provided the information summarized in this article represented schools in seventeen different states. The Indian pupils enrolled in speech classes in these schools came from a cross section of all the major tribes. It was necessary for the writer to abstract and generalize in the presentation of the respondents' comments.

In conclusion, a bit of advice from one of the respondents seems most appropriate for any teacher, not only those with whom this report dealt. A speech teacher in a public high school on the Duck Valley Indian Reservation in northern Nevada wrote: "Build from what you have--expect miracles--but be happy when they come in small quantities."